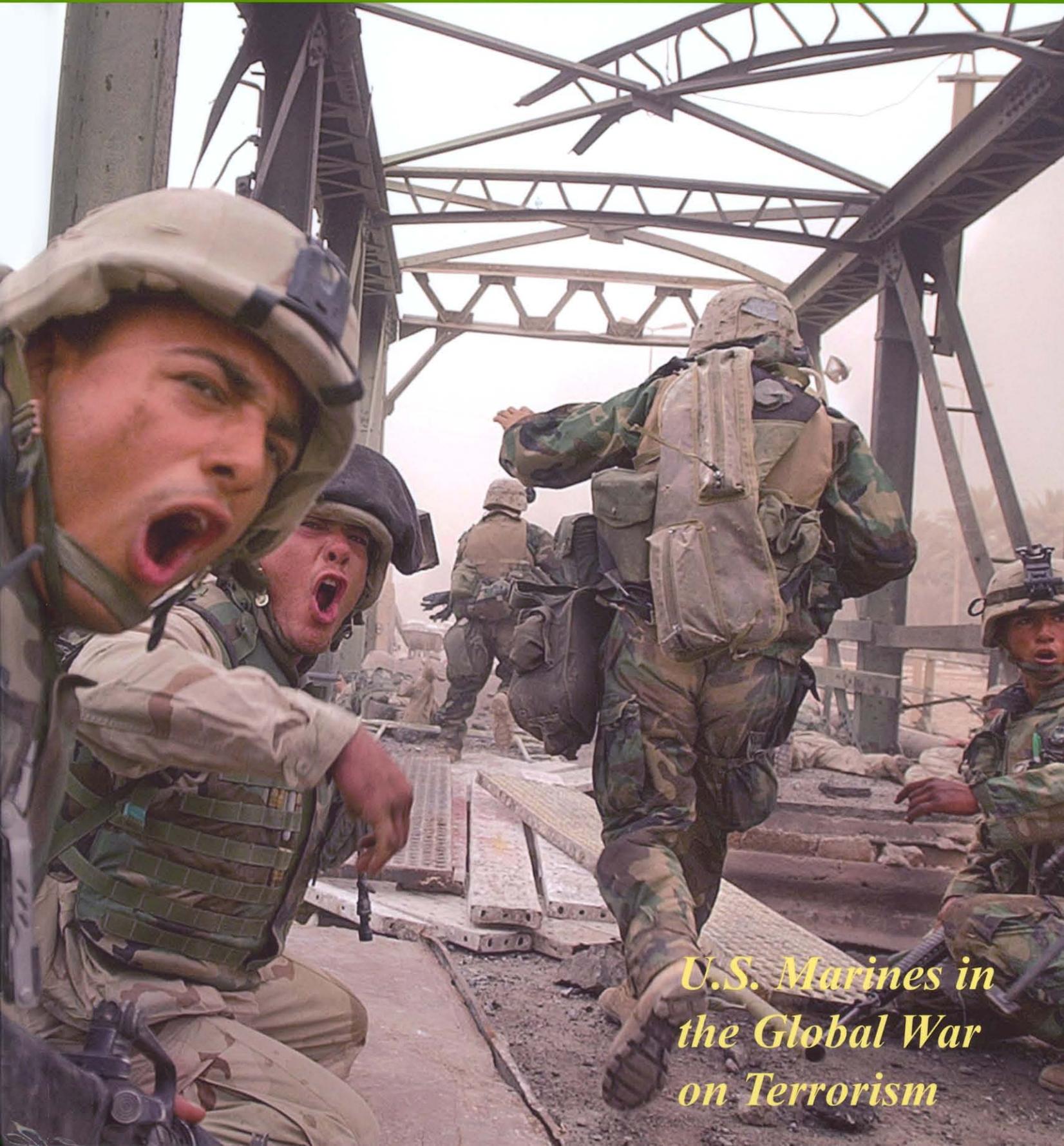


U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2003: BASRAH, BAGHDAD AND BEYOND



*U.S. Marines in
the Global War
on Terrorism*

Cover: Under fire, noncommissioned officers of the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, urge fellow Marines to cross the damaged Diyala Bridge on the southeast outskirts of Baghdad. (©*The Boston Herald/Kuni Takahashi*)

U.S. MARINES IN IRAQ, 2003
BASRAH, BAGHDAD
AND BEYOND

*U.S. Marines in the
Global War on Terrorism*



by
Colonel Nicholas E. Reynolds
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve (Retired)

History Division
United States Marine Corps
Washington, D.C.
2007

Other Publications in the Series
U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism

U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2003: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography

PCN 106 0000 0200

Foreword

The leader of the Chinese communist revolution, Mao Zedong, was once asked by a journalist what he thought was the lasting impact of the French Revolution. He allegedly responded that he did not know the answer to this question as it was “too early to tell.” In this same vein, field historian Colonel Nicholas E. Reynolds’ book on the beginning of hostilities in Iraq is one of the first historical works commissioned by the History Division to focus on the role of the U.S. Marine Corps in the long war against global terrorism.

This particular book is about Marines during the first stage of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). It spans the period from 11 September 2001 to March and April 2003, when the Coalition removed Saddam Hussein from power, and concludes in November 2003 when the Marines left Kuwait to return to their home bases in the United States. While many then believed that the “kinetic” phase of the fighting in Iraq was largely over, as we now know, it was only a prelude to a longer but just as deadly phase of operations where Marines would be redeployed to Iraq in 2004 to combat insurgents (both foreign and domestic) who had filtered back into the country. However, this phase of the fighting would be very different from the one the Marines and U.S. Army had fought in the spring of 2003 in the march up to take Baghdad.

The primary focus of the book is I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF)—the run-up to the war in 2002 and early 2003, especially the development of “the plan,” with its many changes, the exhaustive rehearsals, and other preparations, and then the conduct of decisive combat operations and the immediate postwar period, mostly under the control of the U.S. Central Command’s Coalition Forces Land Component Command. The book also touches upon other Marine activities in the Military Coordination and Liaison Command in northern Iraq and with the British in the south. Nonetheless, the primary focus remains on I Marine Expeditionary Force and the interactions of its constituent elements. Other forthcoming History Division publications will soon offer detailed narratives on Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and II MEF operations inside Iraq.

This book is not intended to be the final story on U.S. Marine Corps involvement in Iraq. To paraphrase Chairman Mao, it is too early for that. But it is not too early for a first cut at the role of the Marine Corps in the early phases of the war in Iraq. These are the first salvoes, intended to bracket the target and start the process of adjusting fire. My view is that it is important to get rounds down range early on, at a time when memories are still relatively fresh and a reasonable number of official sources have become available. My hope is that this book will prove to be a useful overview and introduction to the subject, especially for its Marine students who want to understand the prologue to the continuing war; that it will stimulate further research and healthy debate; and that its readers will perhaps come forward with their own comments and perspectives to be possibly incorporated in follow-on histories.

The author, Colonel Nicholas E. Reynolds, is an infantry officer who has served as a field historian and writer with the Division since 1992. He is the author of two other histories, *Just Cause: Marine Operations in Panama, 1988-1990*, and *A Skillful Show of Strength: U.S. Marines in the Caribbean, 1991-1996*. In January 2000 he became officer-in-charge of the Field History Branch and directed the mobilization and deployment to Iraq of all of the Division’s field historians and one combat artist. Colonel Reynolds deployed to the theater to serve with the Military History Group at Coalition Forces Land Component Command. From that base he supervised Ma-

rine history operations during the combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom and helped to record combined and joint history. Following his deployment, he remained on active duty to write this text and is now a civilian on the faculty at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. He holds a doctorate in history from Oxford University.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C.P. Neimeyer". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps History

Preface

As pointed out in the foreword, this is not a finished official history, but an operational history from one field historian's point of view. It is not intended to be a desktop guide for future operators, but rather a framework for understanding Marine participation in the Iraq War by describing how Marines coped with the set of challenges they faced in 2002 and 2003. Some of the implied lessons may turn out to be universal, such as the ways Marine staff officers worked in the joint arena. But some of the issues that were pressing in Iraq in March and April 2003 may turn out to be irrelevant in other times and places, except in the sense that past is prologue, that we need to understand where we have been if we want to understand where we are.

This was not a bad time to write this kind of history. I had access to an array of sources that flowed into the then History and Museums Division between the summer of 2003 and the spring of 2004. The efficiencies of the computer age played an important role. It has probably never been easier to track down sources and conduct follow-on interviews or ask participants to expand on the record. Above all, I tried to rely on primary sources—oral history interviews, command chronologies, personal journals, and various contemporary documents. Some of the material is based on personal observation from my time in Kuwait and Iraq in the spring of 2003. I found one or two published accounts particularly useful, especially those that clearly laid out how the author knew what he was reporting. A personal favorite is *In the Company of Soldiers* by Rick Atkinson, a journalist who is also a respected military historian. I have written extensive endnotes in the hope that future students of the war will be able to continue where I leave off. Occasionally, I have purposely omitted a name or a source because of the sensitivity of what someone told me. But that is rare. While I am not as free with my opinions as a journalist or an academic might be—I was, after all, writing on government time as a member of a disciplined Service—I have tried to report both the good and the not so good.

This monograph would not have been possible without the assistance of a lot of people. I want to begin by acknowledging my brother Marines, and one sister Marine, in the Field History Branch, who, in 2003, did an amazing job of collecting the raw material of history before it was lost. They served in various billets, both Marine and joint, from the Horn of Africa to northern Iraq, enduring austere and sometimes dangerous conditions to get the job done. Their examples often inspired me. Lieutenant Colonel David T. Watters, my successor as officer-in-charge, was the first to volunteer for mobilization in the fall of 2002, when the war clouds were still forming; Major Melissa Kuo, who served with 1st Force Service Support Group; Chief Warrant Officer William E. Hutson, who drew a difficult assignment in the early days of the war, wrote to me to thank me for giving him the opportunity to serve instead of complaining about his luck; Colonel Reed R. Bonadonna, a talented journal writer, was with Task Force Tarawa during the heavy fighting at An Nasiriyah; Lieutenant Colonel Michael D. Visconage and Major Carroll N. Harris were at neighboring commands during the war, and we formed a kind of historical wolf pack when we flew into Iraq in late April to conduct a series of interviews in Ad Diwaniyah. It was a week I will not soon forget. Major Theodore R. McKeldin III, Lieutenant Colonel Tommy Ryan, USA, and I visited with the British division a few days later, collecting data in and around Basrah. Our British colleagues were wonderful hosts, and I cannot say enough good things about their hospitality and their openness. My hosts at Coalition Forces Land Component Command in the Military History Group under Colonel Neil Rogers, USA, were equally generous with their resources, especially

Major Shane Story, USA, who stayed in touch after the war while he was writing the command's official history.

After returning to Washington, D.C., I read every one of our historians' personal journals, as well as many of the documents and oral histories they collected, great sources for putting some flesh on the dry bones of official records. For the same reason, I looked at a lot of great combat art created by Staff Sergeant Michael D. Fay who is not only one hell of a field Marine, but also the only other member of the branch who was over 50 when the war broke out. It was good to have at least one other Marine in the group who could remember what it was like to be in the Corps in 1975. All of the field historians' materials ultimately found their way into the unit's finding aid, ably compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Nathan S. Lowrey to provide a guide to the vast amounts of data that we collected. Colonel Jeffrey Acosta, who served at Marine Corps Forces Central Command headquarters in Bahrain during the war, added many useful documents he collected, as well as a short history of the command in the operation. Colonel Jon T. Hoffman, Major Christopher J. Warnke, and Captain Christopher M. Kennedy did the same after their trips to Iraq in the late spring and summer of 2003.

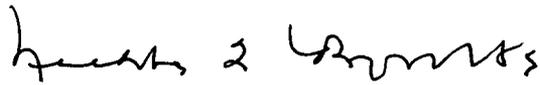
I also want to express my appreciation to all of the Marines who received our field historians in March and April 2003. The 3d Marine Aircraft Wing and the 1st Force Service Support Group went out of their way to make us feel welcome. So too did virtually all of the Marines who sat for interviews, before and after the war. They interrupted busy schedules to meet, in some cases for many hours. One commander even sat for a video teleconference interview a few hours before his Marine expeditionary unit mounted out for the Middle East. Another commander met with me for half a day in Quantico, Virginia, during his pack out to return to I Marine Expeditionary Force and ultimately to Iraq. Talk about dedication to the historical record!

The staff of the History and Museums Division was uniformly helpful, from the director, Colonel John W. Ripley, and the deputy director, Colonel Hoffman, to the Marine on the quarterdeck. I want to express my thanks to all and to single out a few people for special thanks. The chief historian of the Marine Corps, Charles D. Melson, was there for us whenever we needed him. During the writing stage, he shared the remarkable trove of data that he collected, and he was good enough to read the manuscript in draft. The Field History Branch partnered with the Oral History and Archives Sections to conduct and access some 1,300 interviews. Dr. Gary D. Solis, friend and colleague, was instrumental in the process, as were Dr. Fred Allison and Frederick J. Graboske and his staff, Christine Laba and Robert Piehel. Danny J. Crawford, head of the Reference Branch, remains one of the linchpins of the Division. Annette Amerman, also of Reference, did great work correcting and editing the troop list. I would be remiss if I omitted Charles Grow, the curator of the art collection, always imaginative, helpful, and cheerful; graphic designer William S. Hill, who produced wonderful maps; librarian Evelyn A. Englander, always willing to chase down one more source for a writer; Charles R. Smith, Major Valerie A. Jackson, Greg Macheak, and Wanda J. Renfrow, who edited and illustrated the book; and Mrs. Carol Beaupre, the director's executive assistant, ever responsive to calls for help of many kinds.

Mr. Jay Hines, the Central Command historian, was good enough to read and comment on the text, as was my neighbor at the Navy War College, Colonel William J. Hartig, late of the I Marine Expeditionary Force staff. The manuscript finally got into decent shape thanks to the world-class word-processing skills of Ms. Tina Offerjost of Stafford, Virginia, not to mention the editing skills of Ms. Jill Hughes.

Last but far from least is my wife, Becky, fondly known as "the Boss" to the branch, who not only agreed to let me interrupt my civilian career one more time and go to war for a few months but was also as loving and supportive as any man could

want while I was away. I promised her that this would be my last big adventure. I will try to keep that promise. But I will always cherish the camaraderie of the field historians, an unusual band of brothers, and keep a uniform on hand, just in case.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Reynolds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "R".

Nicholas E. Reynolds
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve (Retired)

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	iii
Preface.....	v
Table of Contents.....	ix
Chapter 1 Prelude to War.....	1
Chapter 2 Inside Our Own Loop: Joint Planning for War in Iraq.....	15
Chapter 3 Preparing I MEF for War: The Most Important Fight is the First Fight.....	41
Chapter 4 The Opening Gambit: “Tally-Ho!”.....	57
Chapter 5 The Bridges of An Nasiriyah.....	65
Chapter 6 Toward the Enemy Center of Gravity: Ad Diwaniyah, Al Kut, and the Pause.....	79
Chapter 7 Baghdad: Going Down Fast, Going Down Final.....	89
Chapter 8 No Smell of Saltwater: North to Tikrit, South to Ad Diwaniyah.....	107
Chapter 9 The Other War in the North: Marines in Kurdistan and Mosul.....	113
Chapter 10 A Marriage of Convenience: Cooperation Between I MEF and the British Division.....	121
Chapter 11 Postlude to Combat: Marines and Occupation of Iraq, 2003.....	131
Notes.....	145
Appendix A Data Collection and Lessons Learned Process.....	161
Appendix B Command List.....	165
Appendix C Unit List.....	169
Appendix D Selected Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations.....	177
Appendix E Chronology of Events.....	181
Appendix F Presidential Unit Citation.....	185
Index.....	187



F.D.N.Y.

CAT

1014

Chapter 1

Prelude to War

Before 11 September 2001, the Marines at U.S. Central Command (CentCom) were housed in a tan building that looked something like a double-wide trailer on cinder blocks. It stood almost literally in the shadow of the imposing, and very permanent-looking, CentCom headquarters at the north end of MacDill Air Force Base near the shores of Tampa Bay in Florida. Up until then it was forgivable for visitors to think that the Marine Forces, Central Command, known as MarCent Tampa, was an afterthought, one of CentCom's many appendixes. That was not quite the case, although the situation was as complicated as an infernal machine designed by Rube Goldberg.

MarCent Tampa was a liaison element run by a chief of staff, Colonel John A. Tempone, who was stationed at MacDill and charged with representing the Marine Corps before CentCom. Colonel Tempone did not command any fighting forces, and there was no commanding general on the books, although there was an informal arrangement whereby the senior Marine on the CentCom staff could step into that role. When there was a formal requirement for Marine forces, or for a Marine general officer, the Commanding General, Marine Forces Pacific (MarForPac), who had two corps-sized Marine expeditionary forces at his disposal, would engage; curiously, MarCent Tampa was an outpost of that command, whose headquarters was thousands of miles away in Hawaii at Camp H.M. Smith on the island of Oahu. One of the few things MacDill and Smith had in common was palm trees. With forces spread from California to Korea and Okinawa, MarForPac was, by name and location, part of Pacific Command, well placed for engagement in Indonesia, Korea, or the Philippines, while CentCom was responsible for the Middle East, on the other side of the world. It was the joint command that had fought the Gulf War of 1990-1991 against Iraq and maintained steady pressure on Iraq throughout the 1990s and into 2001, mostly by orchestrating an international Coalition of forces to enforce the no-fly zones in the northern and southern thirds of the country, which were known as Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch.¹

CentCom was now very much in the limelight again. The day after the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September, Secretary of Defense

Donald H. Rumsfeld directed CentCom to prepare "credible military options" to neutralize the terrorist threat to the United States. This spanned contingency plans against a variety of potential targets, including Iraq and Afghanistan. President George W. Bush's administration initially believed these two countries had played a role in supporting or sponsoring the attacks. However, it soon became clear that it was Afghanistan, not Iraq that harbored the terrorist organization that had planned the attacks. By 21 September the CentCom commander, General Tommy R. Franks, USA, had briefed the President on a plan to take the war to that organization, the Moslem fundamentalist Al Qaeda, and to the equally fundamentalist Taliban government of Afghanistan. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Al Qaeda, run by the Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden, had purchased a share of the government, and that he could more or less do as he pleased in the remote, mountainous country wedged in between Pakistan and the other "stans," the small successor states to the Soviet Union north of Afghanistan.²

General Franks' plan to destroy the Taliban and to eradicate Al Qaeda relied heavily on indigenous opposition forces within Afghanistan, especially those known as the Northern Alliance, with heavy support from U.S. airpower, special operations forces, and other government agencies. A broad range of Coalition partners, especially North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, offered various kinds of support. The operation ultimately known as Enduring Freedom would consist of several simultaneous lines of operation ranging from reconnaissance and information operations to unconventional warfare and deep air attacks on enemy lines of communication. American forces would not be heavily committed on the ground. It was, like Goldilocks' porridge, neither too much nor too little, but "just right," an imaginative mix of traditional and "transformational" approaches. No one on the United States side wanted to follow the Russian example, set during years of bloody and ultimately futile fighting, mostly by conventional forces against guerrilla bands that ended in Russian defeat in 1989. Nor did they want to follow earlier American examples of simply firing a few missiles at an elusive enemy.³



DVIC DN-SD-03-11500

On 11 September 2001, five members of Al Qaeda hijacked American Airlines Flight 77 shortly after it took off from Dulles International Airport outside Washington, D.C. After following a circuitous route which took them away and then back toward Washington, they flew the aircraft into the side of the Pentagon. The impact destroyed four of the five “rings” in a section of the building, killing 64 on board the plane and 125 on the ground.

Exactly what the Marine Corps could or would contribute to a fight in a land-locked country was not clear at first, but the MarForPac staff in Hawaii began to focus far more on CentCom than it normally did, eventually splitting itself more or less in two, with one group for the Pacific and another for the Middle East. The first challenge was to gain and maintain “situational awareness,” jargon in this war for knowing what was going on, and then to develop and weigh potential courses of action. For example, could any of the battalion-sized special operations capable Marine expeditionary units, which were loaded on ships, spread throughout the world, and combat ready, be brought to bear? Two suggestions came from then-Lieutenant General Michael W. Hagee, who was serving as the commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF). He passed the word up the chain-of-command to CentCom that the Marine Corps could contribute special operations capable expeditionary units to a fight in Afghanistan and that it could stand up a task force for a mission known as “consequence management.”^{4*}

*A draft of “The Informal History of MarCent” states: “as operations developed, ComUSMarCent was tasked by the Secretary of Defense, and the chairman [of the] Joint Chiefs of Staff and Commander, Central Command to—(1) establish . . . C/JTF-CM [and] (2) support Coalition . . . [forces] with two Marine MEUs under the command of a Marine General Officer . . . [while] deploying MarCent headquarters to Bahrain” (USMarCent, “The Informal History of MarCent,” copy in Reynolds Working Papers, MCHC, Quantico, VA)

This was certainly in line with the thinking of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James L. Jones, Jr., who wanted it known that the Marine Corps was willing and able to commit a Marine expeditionary brigade to the new contingency. General Jones was a proponent of the view that a brigade (which could be made up of two expeditionary units) was the kind of organization that worked well in joint and Coalition operations; a brigade of any kind was a relatively familiar concept to a planner from another Service.^{5*}

The first suggestion set in motion a chain of events that led to the creation, under MarCent’s operational control, of the Combined Joint Task Force Consequence Management (C/JTF-CM), which came to be based at Camp Doha, Kuwait. Commanded and staffed largely by Marines from I Marine Expeditionary Force augmented by Reserve Marines from I MEF Augmentation Command Element (I MACE), C/JTF-CM’s unusual mission was to assist local governments in coping with the effects of a nuclear, bi-

*Gen James L. Jones contrasted the utility of a Marine expeditionary brigade with that of a Marine expeditionary force-forward, which he saw as less useful in the joint/combined arena. The brigade has a checkered history. It was coming back into favor in the early part of the 21st century. Gen Anthony C. Zinni also noted the continuing struggle between the “MEFers,” who believe that the Marine Corps should focus its energies at the force level, and the “MEBers,” who believe the same of the brigade. (Gen Anthony C. Zinni intvw, 7Jan04 [MCHC, Quantico, VA], hereafter Zinni intvw)

ological, or chemical (NBC) attack by, for example, Al Qaeda or Iraq. Its table of organization was equally unusual, eventually coming to include contingents from a number of allied nations, especially NBC units from Germany, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Although it was never called to manage the consequences of an NBC attack during the 18 months of its formal existence, from October 2001 to May 2003, it could have made an enormous difference had Kuwait or another Arab ally been attacked and was a notable experiment.⁶

Thousands of miles away from Kuwait, Afghanistan, or Hawaii, the small MarCent office building in Tampa began to hum with operational intensity—the increasingly more organized and purposeful chaos that characterizes a successful wartime staff. The deputy commander of MarForPac, Brigadier General John G. Castellaw, came to spend time on scene, helping with the interface between that command and CentCom. Other augmentees of various sorts, including recently retired officers and the categories of reservists known as individual mobilization augmentees and individual ready reservists, flowed in.*

Only half in jest, some began to refer to MacDill as “Tampastan.” The workday there was now as long as the workday for Americans in or near Afghanistan, but it was more complicated in some ways, and there were still the peacetime responsibilities of home and family after hours. It was not dangerous like combat, but it was very stressful, and a few CentCom officers suffered heart attacks or other forms of burnout. For Marines there was the additional twist of a complicated “battle rhythm” that spanned numerous time zones. They often had to repeat the same evolution many times over. For example, if an event happened in the Middle East during the day, which was nighttime in Tampa, MarCent officers faced it when they came to work in the morning, which was still night-

*Some picked up the rhythm more quickly than others. This was true of the retired officers, some with CentCom experience, and the individual mobilization augmentees (IMAs), who were trained for specific wartime jobs, but tended to be less true of the individual ready reservists, who came from a large pool of less active reservists. Although MarForPac had an IMA detachment, quickly mobilized to augment its staff to take on the increased responsibilities of two fronts, the small liaison element at MarCent did not. The Marine Corps’ Enduring Freedom Combat Assessment Team suggested that the lesson learned here was, if you do not have your own IMAs you have shaped to your needs, the Marine Corps’ personnel system is unlikely to give you what you want in times of crisis, and you should not be surprised when that happens. (U.S. Marine Corps, *Operation Enduring Freedom Combat Assessment Team Summary Report* [Quantico, VA: MCCDC, 2003], p. 73, hereafter MCCDC, *OEF Summary Report*)



Photo courtesy of U.S. Central Command

An artilleryman by training, Gen Tommy R. Franks, USA, commanded the U.S. Third Army before being selected for promotion to general and assignment as Commander in Chief, United States Central Command. Franks succeeded Marine Gen Anthony C. Zinni to this position on 6 July 2000.

time in Hawaii. They would then have to recap the facts, and their discussions, for MarForPac a few hours later, near the end of their workday but at the beginning of MarForPac’s. On many issues, they also had to engage I MEF, which was a constituent part of MarForPac. Built around 1st Marine Division, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, and 1st Force Service Support Group, it was the Marine air-ground task force that was most likely to send Marines to fight in the Middle East. Being located at Camp Pendleton near San Diego, California, it was in yet another time zone.

There was another small staff at work on contingency plans for Marine operations against the enemy in Afghanistan, the MarCent coordination element, commanded by the redoubtable Colonel John B. Kiser and based at the Naval Support Activity, Bahrain, a compact facility where the Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Central Command (NavCent) flew his flag. To bolster the handful of officers at the coordination element, the Marine Corps created the designation “Commanding General, MarCent-Forward” for an officer who was already in theater for the multinational CentCom exercise in Egypt known as “Bright Star,” and who was able to assume some of the responsibilities of a Service component commander.* That officer was Brigadier General James

*“BGen [James N.] Mattis, originally designated ComMarCent (Forward)... assumed significant responsibilities as the Marine Service component commander forward in the [Area of] [Operations] for ensuring the proper employment, administration, and sustainment of Marine Corps Operating Forces in theater.” (MCCDC, *OEF Summary Report*, p. 63)

N. Mattis, the commanding general of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade, the smaller Marine air-ground task force embedded in I MEF, who was tasked briefly with commanding C/JTF-CM but soon shifted his focus to Bahrain and Afghanistan.⁷

A historian could follow the course of who was in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom by answering the question, where is General Mattis? Born in Richmond, Washington, and educated at Central Washington State College, Mattis was commissioned on 1 January 1972. In 2001 he was a trim 51-years-old. Especially when wearing his reading glasses, he looked like a military intellectual, which would not have been far from the mark. But he was also a field Marine par excellence. Even in a Corps of energetic men and women with a bias for action, to say nothing of their single-minded devotion to their profession, he stood almost in a class by himself. General Mattis' official biography was characteristically brief; it did not contain any personal data, only a list of the military schools he had attended and the

A native of Washington state, MajGen James N. Mattis commanded the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade and Task Force 58 during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan before assuming command of the 1st Marine Division. As commander of Task Force 58, he became the first Marine to command a naval task force in combat.

DVIC DM-SD-07-06012



commands he had held, along with the obligatory official photograph, without the glasses. He had been a lifelong student of war, known for his voracious but discriminating appetite for the printed word. He believed “we face NOTHING [emphasis in original] new under the sun.” It followed that to understand a problem; the approach he recommended was to study its history. For example, during Desert Shield/Desert Storm, when he had commanded an infantry battalion, he had read Bruce Catton's *Grant Takes Command*, studying the need for commanders to get along, as well as books by Erwin Rommel and Bernard Law Montgomery, presumably to learn about desert warfare.⁸ On one occasion, General Mattis described himself as a student of “Sun Zinni,” a tongue-in-cheek reference to another “one of them field Marines that reads,” the iconoclastic General Anthony C. Zinni, who had retired in 2000 after serving as the commander-in-chief at CentCom and had always stressed the need to understand the cultural dimension of war. General Mattis could relate well to enlisted Marines and to senior Pentagon officials, equally comfortable in the roles of salty platoon commander and, less salty, policy maker. Some have described General Mattis as more demanding than most commanders and slow to warm to officers who were not on his team, but also as willing to “go to hell and back” for his Marines.⁹ He liked to say that the secret of success was “brilliance in the basics.” There can be no question that that is what he demanded of his Marines, but there was nothing basic about his ability to think outside the box.

Within days of his arrival in Bahrain on 27 October, General Mattis was shaping plans for amphibious raids into Afghanistan, in effect following up on General Hagee and General Jones' readiness to use a Marine expeditionary unit or, better yet, a Marine expeditionary brigade in that country. Mattis reported to Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore, USN, the commander of NavCent, which included the Marines then afloat in theater. Admiral Moore was charged with responsibilities ranging from deployment and sustainment to warfighting, which meant he was able to send forces into combat. Moore has been described as an unusually aggressive officer, interested in finding ways to take the fight to the enemy; he and General Mattis had no trouble understanding each other. A fellow innovator, Admiral Moore took the unusual step of designating Mattis as the sole commander for the ad hoc Task Force 58, which made him “the first Marine to command a naval task force in wartime.”¹⁰ General Mattis was now serving both as ComMarCent-Forward and as commander of a task force



DVIC DM-SD-06-03033

A Marine from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) carries a full combat load, including an FNMI 7.62mm M240 machine gun, while moving into a security position after seizing Forward Operating Base Rhino in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

preparing for combat. In accordance with his request, it would be designated Task Force “Chaos” after the effect he wanted to have on the enemy, and he himself would use the call sign “Chaos” for the next two years.¹

Under the control of NavCent were the two amphibious ready groups (ARGs) in theater. Each carried a Marine expeditionary unit, special operations capable, built around a battalion landing team of infantry, a helicopter squadron, and a combat service support element. The two units were the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (15th MEU(SOC)), in the ARG built around the USS *Pelelieu* (LHA 5), and the 26th MEU(SOC), in the ARG built around the USS *Bataan* (LHD 5). Together they formed Task Force 58. Admiral Moore made it clear he did not want Task Force 58 to have a large staff, like some Marine expeditionary brigades that had literally hundreds of Marines and sailors on their books. This was fine with Mattis, who liked to work with a very small staff of trusted individuals. The upshot was that the staff stayed small, never exceeding 40 officers and men. It focused on broad-brush planning, while the Marine expeditionary units relied on

their own staffs for the detailed planning and conduct of operations. A sensible corollary was the decision not to “composite” the two expeditionary units, that is, to meld them into one force under one staff, but to keep them intact and to create a supported/supporting relationship between them whereby one expeditionary unit would take the lead for a time, and then the other. In the words of the Task Force 58’s command chronology: “While one MEU executed a mission, the second MEU . . . [could] conduct detailed planning for the follow-on mission.”^{12*}

By 3 November, General Mattis had briefed Admiral Moore on his concept of operations. The admiral provided additional guidance, telling the Marines he wanted them to defeat Taliban and Al Qaeda forces. Moore thought the Marines would make a difference, that a “squad of Marines running through Kandahar would turn the tide.”¹³ But soon the mission changed from conducting raids to seiz-

*The combat assessment team surmised that this “staff lite” arrangement worked because it included the two traditional Marine expeditionary unit staffs; “staff lite” by itself might not have been as successful. (MCCDC, *OEF Summary Report*, p. 64)



ing a forward operating base in order to attack lines of communication and generally support Coalition operations.¹⁴

By the middle of November, the Coalition's Afghan

allies had driven the Taliban's ragtag forces from most of the country's larger cities, including the capital, Kabul, and Task Force 58 was ready to launch. On 25 November, traveling some 400 nautical miles